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## Statement on 2017 Executive Budget Recommendation Forest Preserves of Cook County

Friends of the Forest Preserves is the voice of a diverse community inspiring and organizing people to protect, restore, and expand the forest preserves in Cook County. We represent more than 2,000 members and thousands of forest preserve users and dedicated volunteers.

We appreciate and understand the difficult fiscal situation that the District and County are in at this time. We firmly believe that forest preserve management, planning, and operations have dramatically improved under the leadership of President Preckwinkle, General Superintendent Randall, and his staff. The excellent relationship that Friends has with the Forest Preserves of Cook County is recognized and prized.

However, we must say in no uncertain terms that the proposed 35% (\$2.1million) cut in restoration funding and the lack of any increased funding for land acquisition are at odds with achieving the goals of the NCCP. It is very unfortunate other non-personnel cuts of 12% (\$1.2 million) have to be proposed for want of revenue sources as well.

It is painfully apparent that an increase in revenue for the FPCC is essential to meeting the goals of the excellent Next Century Conservation Plan. It is our belief that a property tax increase is the best way to solve the District's immediate financial challenges and ensure stability in the long term. We also are painfully aware that a property tax increase has not been approved for the preserves in decades and that there are no Commissioners in favor of an increase currently.

We appreciate the alternative plan to seek a referendum in the coming years and will actively work to pass a referendum to support an increase. When the time comes we will encourage Cook County residents to ask their Commissioners to support such an effort.

The lack of long-term care that preceded this administration has led to this unfortunate situation. It is also what led us, together with The Civic Federation, to call for a separately elected Board of Commissioners for the FPCC prior to the tenure of the current administration.

As the smallest item on the tax bill, the forest preserves deliver an excellent rate of return. Improved facilities, recreational opportunities, and healthier nature all make for a great investment in this unparalleled asset. The preserves are a tremendous part of what makes Cook County an excellent place to call home and makes it more attractive to businesses and other investors from outside the County. We must do what it takes to support this precious jewel and ensure it is here for future generations.

Benjamin Cox  
President & CEO

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